

PUBLIC HEALTH NOTES



Minutes to Savor

With the start of a new school year, it can be overwhelming to think that our schedules may become even more chaotic and complex. Time is at a premium for just about everyone. Here are several timesaving tips to help you maintain a healthy diet despite a hectic lifestyle.

- Set the breakfast table the night before to encourage a healthy breakfast (even if this means setting the table for milk and cereal.)
- Keep pancake or waffle batter in the fridge so it is ready to go in the morning. Or prepare pancakes or waffles on the weekend, freeze them, and reheat them in the toaster as needed.
- Bake muffins on the weekend and freeze them. During the week, they can be pulled out and quickly warmed in the microwave.
- Cut up pieces of fruit, veggies, cheese, and meat and divide them into individual size portions. These can be placed directly into lunch bags throughout the week, along with a few toothpicks. Allowing kids to assemble “mini-kabobs” using these foods, saves preparation time for adults and is healthy and fun for children.
- There are many ways other family members can help with meals. Young children can wash fruits and vegetables, tear up lettuce, or set the table. Preteens can help with meal preparation if specific instructions are left for them. Teens can plan/organize/cook meals by being assigned to a specific night of the week. Older children/teens can determine the dinner menu, get a shopping list to the parents at least one week in advance, and gain cooking experience. This way, *they* get to choose the foods they like while learning responsibility and *you* save time. It is important to set guidelines, so that the meal includes at least 3 food groups and a rule that they cannot prepare the same meal more than once a month.
- Prepare once, eat twice. Prepare a double recipe of soups, stews, casseroles, when you have time. Eat half that same week and freeze the other half to defrost and eat when you are in a time crunch.
- Plan out your weekly menus. If you know what you plan to prepare for dinner on Tuesday, you will be able to pull the meat out of the freezer the night before so that it is defrosted when you are ready for it. This saves time compared with trying to defrost it last minute in the microwave. Menus will also save time and money by minimizing the number of trips to the grocery store for last minute items.

Although these tips won't eliminate all the obstacles to healthy eating, they will make it a bit easier to follow a healthy diet and will help to maximize the amount of time you can spend on other activities. For more information on healthy eating tips and for information regarding the latest dietary guidelines, go to MyPyramid.gov or eatright.org.